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# STUDIES

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## QUALITY OF THE NEW BIRTH CERTIFICATE DATA: A FOLLOW-BACK STUDY IN NORTH CAROLINA

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### ABSTRACT

A random sample of 395 North Carolina birth certificates was selected from live births occurring in December 1989, and the corresponding maternal hospital medical records were visually examined to validate data recorded on the birth certificates. Emphasis was on data items added to the birth certificate in 1988. It was assumed that the information in the medical record was more likely to be correct. Birthweight, Apgar score, and method of delivery were found to be very accurately reported on the birth certificates. Reporting was fair to good for tobacco use, prenatal care, weight gain during pregnancy, obstetrical procedures, and events of labor and delivery. Reporting on birth certificates was poor for medical history, alcohol use, conditions of the newborn, and congenital anomalies. Grouping birth certificate items into larger categories (e.g., trimester prenatal care began rather than exact month) will improve accuracy. This study suggests that many of the new birth certificate data will support valid aggregate analyses for maternal and child health research and evaluation.

Note: Paul Buescher, Karen Pinnex, and Mike Bowling are statisticians in the State Center for Health and Environmental Statistics. Mary Davis, who is in the Vital Records Section, did the review of hospital records for this study. She has over 20 years of medical records experience.